

Check the Fire Escape by twoseas

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Everyone Lives/Nobody Dies, And Of Course - Freeform, Bill Hader's shoulders, Eddie and Richie levels of profanity, Feelings, Getting Together, It's mostly from Richie's perspective but my obsession with his shoulders comes across crystal clear, M/M, Reddie tropes galore

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

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Summary:

Richie and Bev talk feelings while preparing snacks and refills for the other Losers.

Someone overhears.

Featuring a characteristically angry Eddie, good friend Beverly Marsh, Richie running dramatically away from confrontation concerning feelings, and the other guys watching it all go down.

Check the Fire Escape

Author's Note:

I've got so many WIPs for this pairing but this is the latest completed one! It's not related to "Ask Me About My New Material" but there are some similarities because I like what I like, what can I say. Writing more from Richie's perspective was super fun because he contains multitudes - he's emotional and tender and a bit of a dick as well as a massively disastrous dumbass.

Please, enjoy!

Bev dug around Richie's fridge, looking through his assortment of newly purchased food - fresh bought just for the gathering of the Losers.

Uncorking a bottle of red wine, Richie looked over her shoulder, shouting orders while she hummed distractedly and pulled cold cuts and other snackable fare out of the fridge.

"Grab the cheese."

"This cheese?" Bev held up a round of gouda.

"No, the cheese."

"This one?" She waved a red wax covered wedge.

"No, Bev. Bev. Beverly. The cheese."

"Jesus, Rich, you have like five different types of cheese in here. Which cheese?"

"All the fucking cheese, who do you think I am?" Richie demanded in mock offense. "What else could I possibly mean by THE cheese of not ALL the cheese. This ain't no basic ass bitch's house, Beverly. I will offer my guests a wide assortment of the finest cheeses Trader Joe's could provide."

“God, you suck!” Bev laughed, throwing a (thankfully sealed) herb covered cheese log at him.

He caught it and offered her an eyebrow waggle. “Only if you ask nicely.”

“I think you’re mistaking me for Eddie,” Bev told him sweetly.

His lecherous grin immediately dropped, face contorted in panic as he spun around and stared down the kitchen entryway. Bev frowned guiltily.

“He’s not there, promise,” she told him sadly. “You know I wouldn’t do that to you, Richie.”

Eddie’s raised voice drifted over to them from where he was clearly having a shouting match with Bill in the living room. Laughter from the others floated in as well, happy and carefree.

Sighing deeply, Richie let the tension in his body go. He nodded at her despondently. “Yeah, I know. You’re a real one. It’s just...scary. The thought he might’ve overheard.”

“You should tell him,” Bev advised, same as she always did.

Richie leaned back on the counter and crossed his arms, a deeply unimpressed look on his face. “Fuck, and I cannot emphasize this enough, *that* .”

“It’s Eddie,” Bev reasoned, rewalking the well trod conversational path. “No matter what his response is, a yes or a no, he’d never be cruel or unkind. He loves you, you’re his best friend - even more than the rest of us. And it’d be good for you, Richie. No, stop that, look at me.”

Richie sighed gustily and looked up from where he’d been pretending to ignore her by examining his nails. His cuticles were in disarray. He needed to get some cream.

“Honey, I love you,” Bev told him earnestly. “I’m not saying all this to be redundant or mean or anything. I say this because I care. I know keeping this to yourself is eating away at you. You told me

coming out made you happier, that saying the words out loud to the other Losers and the world made you feel free to live your life the way you wanted. Don't you think this might also apply to telling Eddie how you feel?"

"It's different," Richie grumbled.

"How?" She asked, a challenge wrapped up in a genuine desire to know. Richie still wasn't used to that - people genuinely wanting to know. He liked it even if it made him squirm.

"It's just-" Groaning in frustration, Richie let his arms fall to his sides like limp noodles. "Things are finally good, you know? We have each other again. I can call him whenever I see something that I think he'll find stupid, I can bombard him with dog pictures and dumb questions. He yells at me any time I do something he thinks is gross or weird and rant worthy. We go over to each others' places, we hang out. I haven't enjoyed staying in New York this much in years. I like it. I like my life now. I love having you all back in it and I just feel like bringing it up with him would be pushing it all too far. What happens when it makes him uncomfortable? Or awkward? He won't want to spend time with me, not like we do now, and you guys will choose sides and I just- it's already so much more than I thought I'd get, what I have now. And I don't want to lose you guys just because I couldn't get my dumb, gay heart under control, you know?"

Next thing Richie knew, he was being pulled into a hug. Bev was a hugger and he liked it very much. She was damn good at the thing. He let himself sink into the embrace, warm and reassuring. She smelled good too, which was something he appreciated. Her perfume, whatever she used in her hair, and the lingering scent of smoke all formed a smell that screamed *BEV* to Richie. He kind of wished he could bottle it just so he could take a whiff any time he felt sad or lost and needed the extra comfort. Richie relished the contact, fully giving himself over to the touch after so many years of keeping people at arm's length.

Then she smacked the back of his head.

"What the fuck, Bev!" He demanded. He jumped away from her and rubbed at the spot she smacked. "Is this what I get for trying to

express genuine emotion and vulnerability? Because I have to say, not really encouraging.”

“I smacked you because you’re being an idiot,” she told him bluntly, but not unkindly. “You’re never losing us. We’re not going to abandon you. Not ever, Richie.”

Chewing the inside of his cheek, Richie tried to let that thought percolate and internalize. That was something he was working on (just ask his therapist), but it was still tough to see his friends’ no-strings-attached affection as something he deserved after so many years without them.

“Ok, let’s say I believe that,” Richie allowed. “I still think telling him is a bad idea.”

“Why?” Bev whined, stepping away from Richie to start organizing the cheese plate.

“*Because*,” he whined back in imitation of her higher pitch. “Eddie’s going through a lot of shit right now, you know? I don’t want to add any undue stress.”

“Really? I’m pretty sure you exist to stress Eddie out. I literally watched you move his drink off the coaster every time he looked away not twenty minutes ago.”

“Yeah, I love riling him up, he’s adorable riled,” Richie admitted. “But I only sweat him about the small stuff. Fun shit like when I pretend not to wash the bottoms of my dishes so he can lose it on me and go on one of his big lectures about bacteria and mold and the dangers of food residue. Not real shit. He’s got a lot of real shit on his plate. Clown trauma and magically resurfaced childhood memories aside, he’s still adjusting to living in a new place and life post-divorce and the fuck load of issues he has to deal with there. You really think he needs the unasked for affections of his also traumatized and issue-riddled childhood friend on top of it?”

“I did,” Bev pointed out with a smile. “If anything, Ben and his love helped me. And keep on helping me.”

Richie put his hand to his heart and sighed a long, drawn out, “Awwwww!”

“Shut up,” Bev laughed, throwing a grape at him.

He caught the grape with his mouth, winking when she clapped her approval.

Plowing on with the topic at hand, Bev continued through her petering off laughter, “I’m serious! Take it from someone who knows all about shitty marriage and the thrilling stress of divorce. Ben loving me didn’t make me feel worse, it made me feel better. Even if he couldn’t solve all of my problems, having him there to offer an ear or hold my hand or even bring me my favorite chips just because he thought it would cheer me up made so much of a difference. And I felt like such an imposition to him all the time, but he refused to hear that and eventually I stopped seeing myself that way too because he wasn’t expecting me to be someone easy and problem free. Ben expected me to be me, nothing more and nothing less. Love like that isn’t a burden, Richie, it’s warmth and comfort and safety. It’s a safe harbor.”

Wrinkling his nose and twisting his mouth, Richie let out a wholehearted, “Yuck.”

“And,” she said with a hard look, “I know you’re that to Eddie. Who was the first person he called about his divorce? Who flew across the country and offered him a place to stay while he sorted his living situation out? Who organized all the Losers to go collect his things from that house? Who accompanies him to his divorce proceedings? Who makes him laugh and takes his mind off things? Who does everything they can to make him happy?”

“...Stan?”

“You, dumbass,” Bev rolled her eyes. “The only difference between you and Ben is you haven’t told him how you feel.”

Refusing to meet her gaze, Richie busied himself with the charcuterie. Because he was an adult who knew what charcuterie was. Maybe. “I will grant you that there are some...minor similarities

between your and Eddie's respective situations. But I have to ask, how the fuck you gonna do your man like that, Miss Marsh?"

"Excuse you?" Bev demanded, pausing in her slicing of an apple to glare at him.

"Comparing *Ben* to *me* ? Cold as fucking ice, babe." Pouring a glass of wine for Bev and himself, Richie raised his eyebrow challengingly. "Ben has the non-threatening charm of a Lifetime Holiday leading man and the looks of a firefighter who poses shirtless with kittens for charity calendars. Saying he has anything in common with me, the Losers' Club resident garbage goblin, is so wrong. It's mean, is what it is."

"First things first, how many of those charity calendars have you bought?" Taking a sip of her wine, Bev gave him a knowing look.

"Oh, so fucking many. I was a closeted gay man. I needed some kind of vent for my lustful thoughts and charity as an excuse was like a gift from heaven. Of course I always 'threw them away,'" Richie air quoted, "because I 'didn't really need them,' I was just 'supporting the cause' and 'helping out.'"

"Stop with the air quotes. And follow up question - do you still buy them?"

"Every year. Including this one. I might be out of the closet and thoroughly invested in online porn these days, but I still always buy extras. I mean, it's for a good cause and I have a huge sense of nostalgia around them. Those brave men got me through many a lonely night."

"Can I have one?"

"Absolutely. I'll even let you have one of the unopened, not-so-sticky ones. Remind me before you leave."

"Will do," Bev grinned. She took another sip and turned a more somber expression towards him. It had him shaking in his metaphorical boots. "You know, I hate it when you talk about yourself like you're not a catch."

Richie snorted, nearly coughing up his wine as she leveled her best, most earnest frown of concern his way. He hunched his shoulders and avoided her gaze. "Come on, Bev."

"Stop it," she murmured, reaching out to stroke some of his hair out of his face. Her fingers twirled the curl that frequently fell in the middle of his forehead out of the way. "I mean it. I was right when I said you'd grow into your looks."

Her expression went sweet and soft, but also almost distant as she traced over his features with her wide eyes. He could tell that she was lost in memories, thoughts of the deadlights and what they showed her, so he reached out quietly and grabbed her hand, giving it a gentle squeeze of reassurance. She cleared her throat and seemed to come back to the present with a grateful half smile.

"You're handsome, Richie. You have lovely eyes, a defined jawline. You're tall with great shoulders I need to design a suit around. More than that, you're wonderful. You're funny, expressive, successful, thoughtful in a way people wouldn't expect. You're fun. You remind us not to take everything so seriously and you draw attention in every room you walk into."

"Stop it, Bev, or I swear to god I'll fall in love with you," Richie joked, sniffing at the utter sincerity his friend directed his way.

"Too late, I know you love me, Trashmouth," Bev countered with a smile. "I wish you could see how great you are. You deserve to be happy."

"I am happy," Richie told her with a downcast look.

"Maybe you are," Bev nodded. "But I think there's another thing you have in common with Ben."

"Our chiseled bone structure?"

"You're lonely," Bev continued on seriously. "I don't want you to be lonely."

"I'm not. I have you guys," Richie tried to argue, but his voice was weak and his heart wasn't in it. Another thing Bev and Eddie had in

common was their ability to break Richie's walls and masks - to cut through his bullshit and find the things that actually made him tick. Stan shared this same power. If they ever realized it and teamed up against him, he was doomed.

"You do. And you always will," she promised. "But I think you want something a little more. And you deserve it. So you should put yourself out there, Rich. I'm not saying Eddie will return your feelings, only Eddie knows how he feels, but I think he'd be crazy to turn a guy like you down."

"But when he does?" Richie asked, shoulders slumped.

"*If* he does, maybe then you can move on," Bev suggested gently. "Find someone else."

"I don't think I'll ever find someone I love as much as Eddie," Richie confessed. "He's my favorite person in the world. No offense."

"None taken," Bev laughed, shoving an apple slice into his mouth. "Maybe you should tell him that. It'd be a good way to start."

"Oh yeah," Richie rolled his eyes and spoke through his mouthful of granny smith. "I can see it now. Hey, Eddie. What's up? I know you're going through a lot right now with your whole divorce and the upheaval of your entire life and all that general Derry bullshit, but just FYI you're my favorite person in the world and I'm totally whipped for you. I was in love with you as kids and I'm in love with you now. So it'd be really cool if we held hands and went on dates and fucked the shit out of each other, if that's something you might be interested in."

A choking noise had the two of them snapping their heads towards the kitchen entryway.

Eddie stood there, eyes taking over his entire face.

"Eddie!" Bev jumped up, hands held out as she shifted into crisis management mode.

Richie's brain screeched to a halt, all thoughts coalescing into a giant AHHHHHHHHH FUCK before resolving into a consistent screaming.

Bev ran to Eddie's side, shooting concerned glances Richie's way, and grabbed him by the arm as if he was trying to escape. He wasn't. He wasn't doing anything. He was just standing there staring up at Richie with wide as all fuck eyes and body language that radiated stunned disbelief so clearly that a literal billboard proclaiming "STUNNED DISBELIEF" wouldn't have done such a good job.

Richie gathered enough control over himself to shutter his expression, blanking his face.

One breath in.

Brain still screaming.

One breath out.

Brain still screaming.

Swallowing down the Emotions™ and probably a little bit of puke, Richie threw back his nearly full glass of wine, chugging the whole thing. He set the empty glass on his countertop with a faint clink.

"I have to go to my room," he told them both in a surprisingly calm voice.

And he proceeded to do just that, walking right past a still motionless Eddie.

"What the fuck," Eddie whispered, finally able to voice a response as he spun to face Bev. "What the fuck, Bev? What the fuck?!"

"Eddie, honey," Bev hushed. "I'm going to need you to calm down."

"Calm down? Calm down?!" Eddie waved his hands through the air, agitated and buzzing and feeling so much of...something. He didn't know exactly what it was but it was something and there was a lot of it.

"Is everything alright?" Ben came in, concern writ all over his face.

“Alright? Alright?!” Eddie squawked.

“It’s fine,” Bev told Ben, expression silently communicating something in the way only couples who actually loved and liked each other managed.

“Did you know about this?!” Eddie demanded. “That Richie’s in love with me!”

“Holy shit!” Bill shouted from the living room. “I knew it!”

The others ran in from the living room, crowding the hall and kitchen entry.

“Wait,” Mike looked to Ben, confused. “I thought Richie was in love with you.”

“What?” Ben sputtered.

“Why would Richie be in love with Ben?” Bill asked, nose scrunched.

“He talks about how hot he is nonstop!” Mike threw his hands up defensively.

“Talking about how hot Ben is doesn’t mean anything! It’s like talking about the weather,” Eddie snapped. “It’s super obvious, you just need to open your eyes.”

Ben made a face. “Thank you?”

“Forget about Ben’s hotness, I can’t believe Richie told you!” Stan declared, steering the conversation back. “I thought he’d take that to his grave.”

“He didn’t tell me, he told Bev and I was walking in and overheard,” Eddie corrected, looking over his shoulder and down the hall to where Richie’s bedroom door had been slammed closed.

“Yeah, that makes more sense,” Stan sighed.

“Not really the important part here, guys,” Bev told them through her teeth.

“I need to talk to Richie,” Eddie said at once, absolutely certain. He squared his jaw and turned towards the master bedroom.

“Maybe give him a minute,” Bev suggested gently, a hand still wrapped around Eddie’s bicep to hold him in place. “He wasn’t exactly planning on telling you.”

“Well tough shit,” Eddie decided. “He’s got to see me and I don’t care if I have to bust his bedroom door down to do it.”

“Richie went into his room?” Ben asked even as he hustled past Eddie with a frantic set to his eyes.

Eddie was absolutely not about to be beaten to Richie by Ben of all people, so he rushed right after him. Everyone else followed suit.

“Why are we freaking out?” Mike asked, exasperated but still keeping pace with Bill and Stan.

“Richie’s bedroom has access to the fire escape!” Ben shouted over his shoulder.

“Shit!” Bev cursed.

Eddie, Ben, and Bev managed to get through the door no problem. It wasn’t locked.

There was also no Richie behind it.

The room was empty, the window wide open.

“Motherfucker,” Eddie hissed, rushing over.

The window was big enough for Eddie, Bev, and Ben to stick their heads out, the other three crowding behind them and complaining in low whispers about not being able to see.

They looked down just in time to watch Richie drop from the last rung of the fire escape’s ladder.

He stumbled a little on impact, grunting out an unhappy, “Shit fuck.”

As soon as he regained his balance, he straightened up and adjusted his jacket, looking around as if to check if someone might've seen.

"Hey, fuckface!" Eddie called out.

Richie jolted in surprise, eyes bugging behind his glasses. He looked up in utter terror.

"Get your ass back in here!" Eddie ordered. "I need to talk to you!"

"Nope!" Richie told him, darting one more look up before he started running off. "Sorry, Eds!"

"Richie!" Eddie screamed. "Richie, you piece of shit, get back here!"

"Enjoy the cheese!" Richie yelled back, disappearing around the building.

"Richie!" Eddie shouted at full force, face contorted in anger. "RICHIE!"

"Hey!" Someone yelled out their own window. "Shut up, will you?"

"How about you mind your own business!" Eddie shot back.

"Some of us are trying to sleep!"

"So go the fuck to sleep and get off my ass! This doesn't concern you!"

"I hope he dumps you!"

"Fuck off!"

"You fuck off!"

"I can do this all day, you wanna fuckin' try me!" Eddie's throat wasn't even hoarse from raising his voice. He'd been reunited with Richie for months. He was back in practice at it.

There was the sound of the neighbor grumbling incoherently followed by the shutting of a window and then nothing but the ambient noise of the city.

Eddie brought his head and shoulders back inside, meeting the various scowls and frowns of his friends with a clipped, "What? That guy was a nosy jerk."

"Not that," Bill told him with a disappointed shake of his head. "Just...maybe it's a better idea to give Richie his space."

"Uh, fuck that?" Eddie suggested his alternative.

"Eddie," Mike tried, voice soothing. "If you go after Richie like this, you're going to break his heart. You need to take a minute. Collect yourself. That way you can let him down gently."

"Let him down gently?" Eddie pulled a face, shaking his head and scoffing. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

"You're pretty worked up," Bill pointed out, waving a hand to indicate all of Eddie's everything.

"Yeah, I am fucking worked up," Eddie told him with heavily enunciated words to properly convey just how worked up he was. "Because I just found out Richie's in love with me and apparently you and Bev and Stan fucking knew and didn't think to tell me?! What the hell, guys?"

"It wasn't our place," Bev told him sternly, Bill and Stan and Ben nodding along in agreement.

"And of course Ben freaking knew too," Eddie growled, tossing his head in frustration. "The actual fuck. Seriously, none of you assholes could've told me? Couldn't have given me a heads up so I'm not so fucking blindsided on my way to get a glass of water that I freeze up and can't tell Richie how I feel back?"

Bev's mouth transformed from a disapproving line into a gleeful smile. "Eddie, what do you mean by how you feel back?"

"Is he saying what I think he's saying?" Stan asked Ben in a low murmur.

"I think he is," Ben nodded, looking dazed.

"You weren't going to let him down," Mike realized, a bemused little grin forming on his face.

"Holy shit!" Bill whooped.

"Oh my god." Eddie pinched the bridge of his nose and shut his eyes. He bowed his head and prayed for patience. "Are you telling me that all of you knew Richie loved me, but NONE of you knew I loved him? What the fuck, guys!"

"Yeah, yeah, give us a hard time over it tomorrow so I can yell at you for never telling us anything," Bev dismissed. "Right now we need to go get your man."

"Agreed," Eddie bit out.

"You and Stan stay here," Bev decided. "Ben and I can check the bars in walking distance. Bill and Mike can walk the streets in case Richie's just wandering around."

Glowering at Bev, Eddie crossed his arms unhappily. "Why do Stan and I have to stay here? I want to go look for Richie."

"He forgot his phone," Bev told him, pointing at the nightstand where Richie's phone sat. "He's definitely coming back for it. I just don't know when. I think that whenever he comes back, you and Stan have the best chance at making him stay and listen."

"That's not wrong," Stan agreed with a quick nod.

"Fine," Eddie sighed. "I'll stay here. But you have to call me the second you find him! That applies to all of you!"

"Of course," Ben told him, laying a comforting hand on Eddie's shoulder. The rest of the Losers nodded their own confirmation.

"Text us if he comes back here. And don't worry, Eddie," Bev smiled at him as they all filed out of the bedroom and got ready to search for the runaway. "You'll get to tell him."

"I fucking better," he grumbled back. "Or I'm gonna kick his ass."

The first place Richie thought to hide was a bar. Literally any bar. If it was in walking distance and served alcohol, it was the bar for him. But then he realized that was one of the first places the Losers would think to look if they decided to come after him.

The second place Richie thought to hide was some place out of the state. Out of the country maybe. But as soon as he decided to look up ticket prices, he realized he didn't have his phone on him and that was that. No plane ticket for ol' Richie Tozier.

That left scant few places to hide and bide his time until his friends eventually got tired of looking for him and occupying his apartment (as at least one of them was no doubt doing).

Parks were out. No way was Richie going to be the forty-year-old gay semi-celebrity skulking around a park after dark. Miss him with that shit.

He could've just walked around, but chance of discovery was high so that was out.

In the end, Richie settled on a CVS a few streets down. He strolled through the aisles aimlessly, picked up random crap, set the random crap back, bought a cold bottled coffee, chugged it while trying on the weird hats CVS always stocked for some reason, ignored the bored and vaguely annoyed looks of the clerk, and killed a few hours.

Hiding from his best friends in a CVS was probably one of the saddest things he'd ever done and he once had to stroll down hate crime memory lane.

Richie finally left around midnight, reluctantly returning home like the universe's most depressing Cinderella.

He snuck back the way he came, praying all the while that none of the Losers had locked his window. Lucky for him, the window was still wide open and he clambered on in. He wasn't exactly grace in motion, but he managed to climb back into his apartment almost

soundlessly.

The place was quiet and dark enough that he let out a relieved sigh. Either the Losers had given up and gone back to their homes and hotel rooms or they were out looking for him. No matter the reason or cause, his apartment was clear enough to give him ample opportunity to get his shit and go.

He stayed quiet just in case one of his friends actually stayed and was passed out on the couch or something, silently grabbing his duffle bag from the closet and stuffing in whatever clothes were closest. Just as he was grabbing his phone from his nightstand, his bed moved.

Screaming, Richie threw himself back, crashing into the wall as he gawked in horror at the moving lump.

The lump grumbled sleepily in a familiar voice, "Richie?"

Then, sitting up straight and letting the comforter fall away from him, Eddie emerged with a far more awake accusation of, "Asshole!"

"Jesus Fucking Christ!" Richie shouted back, hand to his thudding heart. "Are you trying to give me a heart attack? What the hell are you doing in my bed?"

Not something he ever thought he'd ask Eddie in such an unhappy tone.

"You ran away," Eddie hissed. "I had to wait for you. You left your phone here, dumbass. Bev knew you'd have to come back."

Richie opened his mouth to respond in some way that probably wouldn't have helped his case at all, but he just as quickly shut it as the door swung open.

"I heard yelling," Stan said at once, Richie's baseball bat held aloft in his hand. He looked over and squinted, scanning Richie in the near dark of the room. "But I guess it was just you, huh? Sort your shit, Tozier. I'm sleeping on your couch, so keep it down."

With that, Stan flicked the lightswitch on and shut the door, leaving

Eddie and Richie alone.

Gulping, Richie slowly turned away from the now closed door and met Eddie's furious gaze. He tried to smile, but he felt how awkward it was on his face. "Hey, Eds."

"You little bitch," Eddie spat at once. "I can't believe you didn't come back until after midnight. You're lucky I don't have work tomorrow!"

"Super sorry for that," Richie said with a quick bob of his head. "But, uh, you really didn't have to wait up."

"Yeah, Richie, I really did have to because you *ran away*," Eddie told him with a hand chop.

God, Richie loved it when he did the hand chop.

He was so weak.

"I mean..." Richie grimaced, unable to come up with a proper response. He should have spent less time in that CVS trying on dumb hats and more time thinking about what to tell Eddie once he go out. Man, he was dumb as shit. "Yeah."

"Yeah?" Eddie snapped. "You're going with 'yeah' right now? You had us all worried, dickweed! You didn't have your phone! You could've been bleeding out in some filthy, rat infested alley and the last thing you would've said to us was 'enjoy the cheese.' You're such a fucking asshole!"

"Ok, so, fair," Richie admitted. "But also Stan's trying to sleep out on my couch and asked us to keep it down so..."

Eddie breathed in and out very deeply. "I'm going to kill you. I'm actually going to kill you."

"What do you want me to say?" Richie finally asked, shoulders hunching. "Come on, Eds. I don't exactly have a great fucking defense here. For once in my life I can't play this off as a joke and I'm tired. So like...I'm alive. Not dead in a ditch. Sorry for worrying you. Now please leave so I can go to bed."

“Is that what you want? Want me to just leave. Just forget this happened and go on business as usual.” Working himself up into a full on fit, Eddie pointed at Richie and managed an expression that was somehow both mockingly casual and completely enraged. “And you just get to go to bed. You spend hours doing who the fuck knows what while the rest of us look for you and worry about you and have fucking panic attacks over where you might be but now that you’re back I just have to let that go so you can climb on in and go to bed!”

“I might cry a little bit first,” Richie admitted, throwing his hands out in the universal gesture of “Exhausted and resigned to this terrible lot in life.” He could feel the panic and sadness and the fucking Emotions™ choking him and he gave himself maybe thirty seconds before he was a sobbing, pathetic ball of unrequited feelings. The mess was coming and he resolutely did not need Eddie seeing him like that. “Probably throw up too. But yeah, Eddie, I want you to leave so I can do that.”

All the anger drained from Eddie’s face, leaving him wide eyed and concerned. His sharp voice softened. “Cry? Throw up? Why the fuck would you do that?”

“Oh my god, why do you think, Eddie?” Richie asked, voice thick. His eyes stung and oh, boy. It was happening.

“Oh, shit, no!” Eddie scrambled from Richie’s bed, hands held out in a pacifying gesture. He tripped a little on one of Richie’s slippers, cursing as he regained his poise. “Motherfucking loose slipper. Ok, no no no! Do not cry. There’s no reason to cry.”

“Wow, man.” Regarding Eddie through his increasingly blurry vision as tears pooled and threatened to spill, Richie thinned his lips. “That’s fucked up. Don’t tell me how to feel.”

“I wasn’t!”

“You really were. That’s a shitty thing to do.”

“I wasn’t telling you how to feel,” Eddie argued, huffing out a frustrated groan. “Jesus, I was- fucking shit. Ugh, I can’t believe I’m somehow fucking this up worse than you fucked it up.”

“Ok, so you’re gonna say that to the crying guy,” Richie mumbled.
“Cool.”

Raising his voice, Eddie looked up at Richie, earnest and beseeching.
“Please don’t cry or throw up.”

“Well,” Richie sniffled. “I’m definitely already doing one of those things.”

“Fuck!” Eddie cried, manic and upset. He rushed over and Richie could barely blink in shock before Eddie was up in his space, hands reaching out to wipe away the couple of tears that had managed to fall. Luckily for them both, Richie had yet to enter Ugly Cry Mode so it was all pretty neat and easy. “I screwed up, Rich. I screwed up so bad. I was just worried, you know? Like I really thought you would’ve come back sooner or one of the guys would’ve found you right away. But then it was one hour then two then three and it’s New York City and it’s nighttime and I know the crime statistics and they are not reassuring at all so I was really fucking worried! I didn’t mean to just like start laying in on you, I swear! I had a whole speech planned and it was going to be freaking good! Bill wishes he could write a speech as good as the one I had planned. In it I was only going to give you kind of a hard time for worrying us. But then you came in and you were fine and I just-just- I freaked. Sorry. I’m sorry.”

This whole thing had Richie shocked enough to halt his crying.

Eddie ended his speech with an apologetic shake of his head, eyes shining like he was close to tears himself. He still had Richie’s face in his hands, thumbs stroking soothingly back and forth along the planes of Richie’s cheekbones.

It was devastating.

Richie cleared his throat and rasped out, “Could you maybe get your hands off my face?”

Eddie shook his head more adamantly. “No. Wait, why?”

“Um, because you have the soulful eyes of a young highland cow and the handsome face of a sarcastic but no nonsense Italian policeman

who romances the spunky young Irish immigrant in a film set in 1930s Brooklyn. Which is a lot for me to deal with on a normal day, but, uh, with how I'm feeling after what happened today and with your hands on my face it's becoming kind of...a lot."

"Oh. Good 'a lot' or bad 'a lot'? Also, what the fuck was that about my face? That was so specific, Richie."

"Does that really matter?" Desperation wormed its way into Richie's voice.

Eddie still hadn't let go of his face.

"Kind of? It was specific enough that it sounded like it could be from a movie, but I've never seen a movie like that so..."

Eddie trailed off with a shrug that Richie could feel through his palms.

Because Eddie still hadn't let go of his face.

And he was so close and Richie was so, so screwed.

"Eds, buddy," Richie croaked. "I'm begging you here. I'm entirely too gay and sad to handle the hands of the man I love being on my face right now."

Eyes stretching wide like a headlight caught doe, Eddie muttered, "Oh, fuck. How do I keep not telling you?"

Doing his best to ignore the soft, strong hands still on his goddamn face, Richie cleared his throat and focused on Eddie's words. "Not telling me what?"

Licking his lips (what the fuck with that sexy shit), Eddie looked around at everything except Richie's eyes. "Richie," he inhaled, face pinching like he was bracing for something drastic. "You're my best friend. I love you."

"Yeah, man, I know," Richie nodded, frowning at Eddie's emotional eyes. "Thanks. Did Mike coach you on letting me down easy or something?"

The grip on Richie's face tightened and Eddie shook his head up and down, forcing Richie into a weird, puppet-like bow and nod.

"How are you this stupid?" He asked snappishly, now shaking Richie's face side to side. His lips were pursed and his brow was furrowed, his forehead creased. "I know you're smart. You literally spent twenty minutes talking about the history of American cinema with that kid at the record store last week. You even had book sources. You're fucking smart. So how the fuck are you this stupid?"

One of Eddie's hands left Richie's face, but only so he could point his index finger and jab Richie three times in quick succession right in the middle of his forehead. Richie went a little cross eyed trying to see it.

"Talent?" Richie suggested with a sad smile.

"God, Richie," Eddie groaned, head dropping forward and landing right against Richie's chest. His hands moved from Richie's face, sliding down the sides of his neck and coming to rest on his shoulders. Fingers gripped his shoulders tight, his jacket bunching up under Eddie's steady hold.

Richie swallowed.

"How do I get through your thick skull," Eddie muttered to Richie's not-quite-Ben-level pecs, "without physically drilling through the bone."

Backing up, Eddie met Richie's gaze head on, jaw set and serious. "Richie, I don't just love you. I'm in love with you. You're my favorite person in the whole world. I'm very interested in holding hands and going on dates and fucking the shit out of each other. Please."

"Oh," Richie choked, tears re-blurring his vision.

"Stop crying!" Eddie told him, voice pitched up in panic.

"Dude, stop telling me how to feel."

"I'm not telling you how to feel I'm telling you to stop crying."

“That’s basically the same thing.”

“Ok, Jesus, fine. I’m sorry. Fuck. Why are you crying now?”

“I’m really happy,” Richie told him with a hiccup and watery grin.

Mouth twisted in a smile disguised as a frown, Eddie studied Richie’s face. “You’re crying because you’re happy?”

“Yeah, man, get off my dick about it.”

“You’re awful and I love you.”

Startled into a laugh, Richie swiped at the tears freely falling down his face. “Thanks. You’re a tiny little man who is full of rage and I love you a disgusting amount.”

“I’m taller than Bill.”

“Are you though?”

“Yes, dipshit, it’s a measurable fact.”

“I dunno, Eds.”

“Shut the fuck up, Richie!”

Stan’s voice called out, muffled by the walls and yet very clearly unamused. “How about you both shut up so we can all go to sleep?”

“I told you we needed to keep it down for Stan.”

“Ugh.” Gripping Richie’s shoulders even tighter, Eddie did his very best to murder Richie with eye daggers. “If you don’t shut your stupid mouth and kiss me, I’m going to lose it.”

“Ok, yup. Say no more.”

“You’re still not kissing me.”

“I’m psyching myself up.”

“Asshole!”

“What?!”

“Do you realize how terrible that sounds? ‘Psyching yourself up,’” Eddie scoffed. “You should not have to psych yourself up to kiss me.”

“I’m still not sure if this is real, Eddie, of course I have to psych myself up.”

“Do I need to tell you what to do?” Eddie asked with a sardonic lift to his eyebrow.

Gulping, Richie nodded his head maniacally. “Yes, please.”

Eddie froze. “Wait, seriously?”

“Yes. I like it.”

Opening and closing his mouth, face reddening, Eddie looked as close to speechless as a man like him could be. Eventually he just pat Richie’s shoulder decisively. “We’re going to explore that later.”

“Oh my god, yes.”

“But for now,” Eddie told him, voice gravelly, “Put your big dumb hands on my face.”

Richie couldn’t deny Eddie and so he placed his shaky hands on the sides of Eddie’s face with all the care and attention something as precious as Eddie deserved. Eddie smiled, genuine and tender.

“Cute,” Richie murmured breathlessly, eyes fixed on Eddie and his impossibly perfect features. “Cute, cute, cute.”

“Dick,” Eddie huffed, laughing under his breath. The hands on Richie’s shoulders trembled faintly. “Now lean in and kiss me.”

The screaming in Richie’s brain went silent, replaced by everything good and everything Eddie. Thudding hearts. Soft lips. Shuddering breaths. The minty taste of toothpaste. The faint rasp of barely there stubble under his fingertips. Just the slightest hint of tongue, the shameless little tart. Anymore of that and Richie wouldn’t be able to wear white at their wedding.

Because there was definitely going to be a wedding.

A kiss like this from a person like Eddie demanded the deepest and most committed kind of loyalty.

Richie pulled away with a disbelieving chuckle.

“What are you doing? Get the fuck back down here.”

Yanking Richie back in, Eddie took over the kiss with all the force of a natural disaster.

Richie smiled against Eddie’s lips, heart leaping up and down.

“Stop smiling,” Eddie complained into the nonexistent space between their lips. “It’s making it too difficult to make out.”

Putting enough space between them to properly look at Eddie, Richie let his thumb trace the upturned lines of Eddie’s mouth.

Richie grinned, wide and completely, utterly in love. “You first.”

Author’s Note:

Bev, slamming through the bedroom door: DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY BARS BEN AND I LOOKED IN, EDDIE? YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO TEXT US IF HE CAME BACK. INSTEAD WE HAD TO FIND OUT FROM STAN

Eddie: Um

Richie, throwing a sheet over Eddie: This feels like a conversation better had while fully clothed